Nine Mile Creek Drainage

Fuels Assessment

Areas within the one mile of home sites:

The Nine Mile Creek Drainage runs primarily north-south from Wallace through the community of Bunn. Nine Mile Road provides access between Wallace and Bunn and the communities to the north including Prichard and Murray. The ownership of the drainage is a scattering of BLM, US Forest Service, and private owners. Forest conditions in the drainage support wet site tree species such western red cedar, western hemlock, grand fir, and some of the drier site species such as Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine.

Forest management activities in this drainage have created a mosaic of forest conditions from dense forests to open, young timber. Fire spread in this drainage would not be expected to move rapidly and with intense heat, except for the factor of the very steep slopes. In less than 5 miles, the steep slopes of this drainage raise from 2,700 feet in Wallace to 4,186 feet at Dobson Pass. These steep slopes will dictate that any fire fighting activities will only be able to hold the line at the crest of ridges. Home site protection will rely on the creation of defensible spaces around homes before the fires start.

Steep canyon walls and the north-south orientation of the drainage both contribute to the wet microsite conditions found here. Although this translates into a reduced fire risk as compared with the dry conditions to the east in the Canyon Creek Drainage, it also means that the site has produced more debris from branches, brush, and dead trees from increased competition. This increased fuel is a concern, especially when high temperatures, low humidity, and winds combine to increase the forest fire risk.

A few homes in this drainage are surrounded by fields while some have the trees near their home thinned. These sites are considerably more protected from a potential forest fire than their neighbors are. Fire fuels in the areas frequented by home sites in this

drainage range from fire behavior fuel model 8 to 10. Some of the south and west facing aspects, higher on the slope, are better characterized by fuel model 2.

Areas within 3 miles of the community center, but outside the one mile home zone:

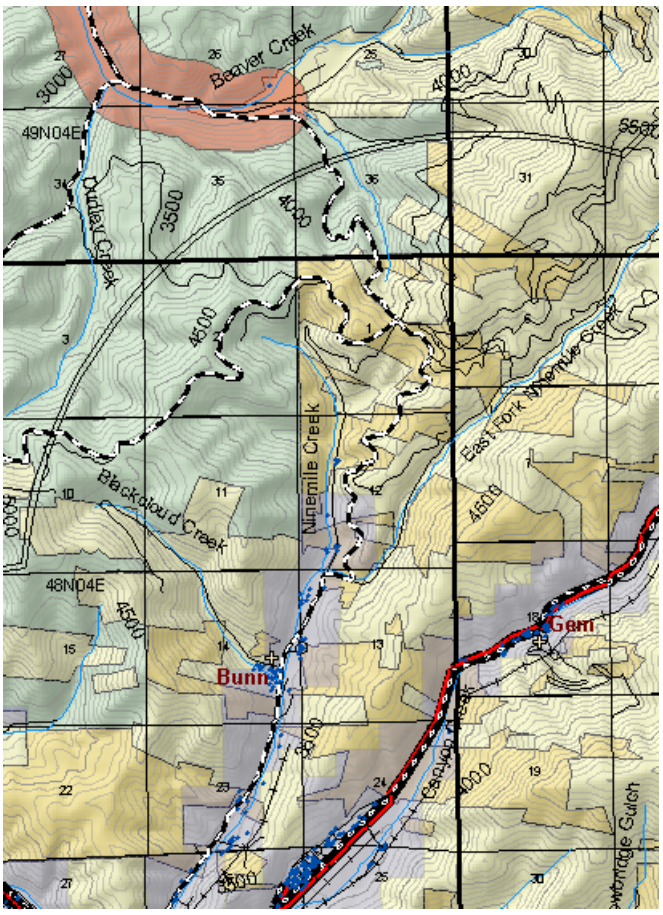
There is no significant difference between the forest conditions surrounding the home sites of this drainage and the timber found along the ridge tops. For planning purposes, the differentiation between the two can be ignored in favor of considering the creation of defensible zones around the home sites and considering fire spread potential in the river drainage.

Two escape routes for residents of this community are provided. The most immediate is to evacuate to the south (Wallace). In the event this route is blocked it would be possible to drive north over Dobson Pass to Prichard. These escape routes should be clearly marked.

Community Risk Assessment

Ninemile Creek drainage is located north of Wallace and has approximately 77 structures located in it. All of these structures are surrounded by the forest and are difficult to access because of the terrain. All of these structures are considered to be at high-risk to loss in the event of a wildfire.

Rural fire protection is provided by Fire District №1 with a fire station in Osburn. Wildland fire protection is provided by the Idaho Department of Lands in Cataldo.



The greatest risk for casualty loss in the Nine Mile Creek Drainage is a wildfire that starts in the vicinity of Wallace and then spreads up-canyon in the direction of Bunn and Dobson Pass. If this ignition is accompanied by northerly to northeasterly winds, the steep canyon walls may act to blow the heat, flames, and smoke of the fire up the river bottom. This “worst-case-scenario” would be difficult to access and fight. In fact, it would be a challenge to evacuate the residents of the area by exiting the drainage via the Nine Mile Creek road to the north of the drainage (into Prichard).

Defensible zones around home sites may be the key to protecting personal property. In this drainage, home protection zones should include a light thinning of trees at a distance of no less than 150 feet from home sites. The reduced protection zone distance in this drainage is a reflection of the wetter microsite conditions found here. In this 150 foot buffer zone, trees should be pruned, brush slashed, piled, and burned after the fall rains have started.

Aggressive home defensible space activities should be carried out by all homeowners as many of the homes in this drainage have wooden porches, trees overtopping roofs, firewood stacked against houses and garages, and other high-risk conditions around the home sites.

Analysis of the region indicates that forest conditions along the ridge separating Nine Mile Creek and Canyon Creek are at a high risk to fire ignition and its subsequent spread. Past forest management activities will act to mitigate this potential spread, but it is unlikely that these activities will serve to halt the fire’s potential spread. Once a fire has started in either of these two drainages, it is likely that the fire will be able to spread over the ridge top and then back down the adjoining canyon directly, or spot into the adjoining canyon, moving with the prevailing winds which are generally northeasterly. These fires that back down a slope move slowly down the hill, but tend to burn very intensely because of an ample supply of oxygen and preheating of the fuels. In both drainages, a defensible space around homes will be a key factor to saving residential property in the event of a wildfire.

Forest management activities along the ridge separating the Canyon Creek Drainage and the Nine Mile Creek Drainage may prove to be beneficial to many of the surrounding communities. The project area would include the ridge's east and west facing aspects in sections 26, 23 (SE corner), 24 (NW half), 13 (all), 12 (SE half), and section 7 (see the community map for locations). Drastic forest stand modifications are warranted in this zone. Forest fuel modifications would reduce the risk of fire spread dramatically. This entire ridge would benefit from slash treatments involving a mixture of piling and burning and/or underburning in the fall or spring. The sites to target would include those ridge locations between homes in either drainage, especially in sections 26 and 24. This would reduce the potential for loss due to wildfire in Wallace, and all communities in both the Canyon Creek Drainage and the Nine Mile Creek Drainage. The majority of these modifications will be on private and BLM forestlands.